

Message Text

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ACTION ORM-02

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 IO-13 ISO-00 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 VO-03 SCA-01 INSE-00 TRSE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1328

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

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FOR: DEPT D/HA/ORM

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF

SUBJ: WILSON-BERTA MEETING

SUMMARY: WILSON-BERTA MEETING RAISED ISSUE OF FUTURE OF REMAINING REFUGEES IN THAILAND. UNHCR POSITION IS THAT REFUGEES BE GIVEN TIME FOR VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION. USG HAS INTEREST IN INTERNATIONALIZING EFFORT AFTER HAVING ALREADY TAKEN LARGE SHARE OF BURDEN. END SUMMARY.

1. HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS COORDINATOR WILSON MET WITH DR. BERTA, UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE, THAILAND, JULY 27. AFTER TOUR D'HORIZON OF UNHCR'S WORK IN THAILAND, BERTA EMPHASIZED THAT EFFORTS TO DATE WERE EMERGENCY STOP-GAP MEASURES ONLY, AND SOLUTION WAS NEEDED TO RESOLVE REAL PROBLEM OF THE REFUGEE SITUATION NOW EMERGING. THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM, AS BERTA SEES IT, WILL BE THE QUESTION OF WHAT TO DO WITH REMAINING REFUGEES, PRESENT TOTAL 70,000, AFTER THE U.S. PAROLE PROGRAM AND OTHER THIRD COUNTRY SELECTIONS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED. UNHCR PROJECTS SUB-

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STANTIAL INCREASE OF THIS TOTAL; 2000 WERE REPORTED FOR

JULY ALONE. ASIDE FROM CURRENT INDOCHINA REFUGEES, THE UNHCR ALSO CONSIDERS SOME 6,000 REFUGEES FROM BURMA AND 50,000 NORTH VIETNAMESE FROM EARLY 1950'S TO BE PART OF OVERALL THAI REFUGEE PROBLEM.

2. THUS FAR, THE UNHCR HAS EXPENDED ABOUT NINE MILLION DOLLARS ON EMERGENCY RELIEF. CAMP SHELTER, HAS FOR THE MOST PART, BEEN COMPLETED, THOUGH THEY FEEL THAT SOME ADDITIONAL HOUSING MAY BE NEEDED FOLLOWING A NEW ASSESSMENT AFTER THE CAMPS STABILIZE. FOOD, MEDICAL CARE CONTINUE TO BE PROVIDED BY UNHCR THROUGH THE THAI MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. ADDITIONAL COMMODITY AND MEDICAL INPUTS ARE BEING PROVIDED BY SEVERAL VOLAGS, ESTIMATED AT 2.5 MILLION DOLLARS TO DATE.

3. UNHCR'S PREFERRED POSITION IS THAT REFUGEES BE REPATRIATED VOLUNTARILY TO THEIR HOMELAND, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE. IN ORDER TO MOVE TOWARD THIS SOLUTION DR. BERTA SEES HIS BEST STRATEGY AS KEEPING THE CONDITIONS IN REFUGEES CAMPS AT A LEVEL WHICH WILL PROVIDE FOR THE REFUGEE'S BASIC NEEDS, BUT WHICH WILL NOT BE BETTER THAN LOCAL CONDITIONS, THEREBY DISCOURAGING REFUGEES COMING TO, AND STAYING INDEFINITELY IN THAILAND. A CARROT TO ENCOURAGE VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION MIGHT BE A COMMITMENT BY THE LAO GOVERNMENT TO RECEIVE RETURNED REFUGEES WITHOUT PENALTY UNDER A PROGRAM SUPERVISED BY THE UNHCR DESIGNED TO GIVE PROTECTION TO AND PROVIDE RESETTLEMENT ASSISTANCE FOR THE REPATRIATES. BERTA FELT THAT AUSTERE BUT HUMANE LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS ON THE ONE HAND AND UNHCR-LAO GOVERNMENT GUARANTEES OF SAFE REPATRIATION ON THE OTHER, MIGHT PERSUADE SOME OF THE REFUGEES TO RETURN. IN HIS OWN CANDID OPINION, HE EXPECTS MOST REFUGEES WOULD STILL CHOOSE TO REMAIN IN THAILAND. IT WOULD, HOWEVER, BE NECESSARY TO PUSH AHEAD TO INSURE THE REFUGEES ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOLUNTARILY RETURN HOME. REPATRIATION OF VICAM REFUGEES IS NOT FORSEEN AS FEASIBLE BY BERTA.

4. IN ORDER TO PUT HIS VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION STRATEGY INTO EFFECT, DR. BERTA FEELS HE NEEDS AN INTERIM PERIOD, WHICH IN EFFECT WOULD CONSTITUTE A HOLDING OPERATION, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TEMPORARY IN NATURE, FOLLOWING MUCH THE SAME PATTERN AS THE PRESENT SYSTEM. HE FEELS THAT ANY DISCUSSION OF PERMANENT SETTLEMENT WOULD BE SEEN AS A DISCOURAGEMENT TO VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION OF THE REFUGEES. BERTA SEES THIS INTERIM SITUATION LASTING PERHAPS UNTIL SEPTEMBER 1977. WHILE RECOGNIZING THE NUMEROUS PITFALLS ALONG THE WAY, DR. BERTA FELT THAT A SERIOUS EFFORT AT VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION MUST BE MADE AND SEEKS UNDERSTANDING, SUPPORT AND

COOPERATION OF RTG, OTHER GOVERNMENTS AND INTER-NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. HE STRONGLY FELT THAT THE OFFER OF A VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION PROGRAM WOULD BE POLITICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY NECESSARY BEFORE THE RTG COULD BE PERSUADED TO FACE UP TO THE NEED FOR A PERMANENT SOLUTION. POST COMMENTS: THE LONG-TERM RESETTLEMENT PROBLEMS WHICH RTG MUST FACE ARE FORMIDABLE. LARGE, PERMANENT, AGRICULTURALLY BASED RESETTLEMENTS POST ADDITIONAL BURDENS ON A GOVERNMENT ALREADY PRESSED TO TRY TO EXPAND AGRICULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS OWN CITIZENS. LAND GRANTS TO REFUGEES WOULD CERTAINLY FACE STRONG CRITICISM ON THE NATIONAL POLITICAL LEVEL AND EVEN STONGER OPPOSITION FROM VILLAGE LEVEL GROUPS, WHO TRADITIONALLY HAVE STRONGLY OPPOSED GOVERNMENT ENCROACHMENT EVEN ON LANDS WHICH ARE NOT IN AGRICULTURAL USE BUT ARE USED BY THE VILLAGERS FOR HUNTING GROUNDS, SOURCES OF BUILDING MATERIAL, WATER SHEDS, ETC. LARGE REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS ALSO ATTRACT CRITICISM, WHEHTER TRUE OR NOT, THAT THEY RECEIVE BETTER TREATMENT THAN THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION. SOMETIME THIS CRITICISM IS JUSTIFIED, ESPECIALLY IN CAMPS WHERE A RELIGIOUS BASED VOLUNTARY AGENCY WILL MAKE AN UNDERSTAND-ABLY SPECIAL EFFORT TO HELP THEIR CONVERTS.

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PRESENTLY BERTA IS CONCERNED ABOUT LARGE CAMPS CLOSE TO THE BORDER OF COUNTRIES FROM WHERE THE REFUGEES ARE FLEEING. HE FEELS THAT THESE CAMPS ONLY SERVE TO INCREASE BORDER TENSIONS AND SHOULD BE MOVED. EVEN WITH THE MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES FROM THE BORDERS AREAS LARGE REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS STILL HAVE A TENDENCY TO CREATE TENSIONS. THESE ARE INEVITABLY CREATED OVER LOCAL LAND DISPUTES, CHARGES OF CORRUPTION AND EXPLOITATION, CHARGES OF TOO LITTLE GOVERNMENT AID, OR TOO MUCH, ACCUSED OF ATTRACTING INSURGENT ACTIVITY AND JUST ABOUT ANY OTHER WOES THAT CAN BE PILED ON A CONVENIENT WHIPPING BOY. WHILE LARGE SETTLEMENTS ARE AN INTERESTING CHALLENGE TO PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS, THEY ARE OFTEN POLITICAL NIGHTMARES FOR A GOVERNMENT AGENCY TO IMPLEMENT. IN A COUNTRY WHERE NATIONAL UNITY IS CRUCIAL, IT IS HOPED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL WEIGH ALTERNATE PROPOSALS AND SELECT THE LEAST POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE PROGRAM. THESE AND OTHER PROBLEMS WILL NEED TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE RTG WHEN THEY ARE FINALLY SEIZED BY THE PROSPECT OF LONG-TERM SETTLEMENT.

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5. FUNDING IMPLICATIONS: DR. BERTA FELT THAT BY USING THE VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION EFFORT AS A BANNER, APPEALS FOR FUNDING WOULD HAVE MORE SUPPORT IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. HE POINTED OUT THAT ADDITIONAL FUNDING WOULD BE REQUIRED TO SUSTAIN THE REFUGEES, ALBEIT MORE AUSTERELY, DURING THIS INTERIM PERIOD PRIOR TO THE UNHCR AND THE RTG WORKING OUT LONG-TERM PLANS FOR CY 78 AND BEYOND. FOR CY 1977, UNHCR FORESEES A FUNDING LEVEL REDUCED SOMEWHAT DUE TO PLANS TO REDUCE SUPPLEMENTARY FOODS WHERE REFUGEES ARE HOPEFULLY ABLE TO PRODUCE FOR THEMSELVES. IN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, BERTA ESTIMATED THAT PERHAPS A FIFTY TO SIXTY PERCENT REDUCTION OF CY 76 LEVELS WOULD BE POSSIBLE. HE STATED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO WORK UP THESE FUNDING ESTIMATES.

POST COMMENTS: SINCE SERIOUS RESETTLEMENT EFFORTS PRE-SUMABLY WOULD NOT BE INITIATED UNTIL LATE 1977, CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF REFUGEES IN CAMPS WOULD HAVE TO CONTINUE AT A MINIMUM THROUGH 1978 AND QUITE PROBABLY BEYOND. PAST RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT IF ALL GOES WELL, AND IT SELDOM DOES, A MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS ARE REQUIRED TO GET REFUGEES BACK ON THEIR FEET AND SELF-SUPPORTING AGAIN. EXPERIENCE ALSO HAS PROVEN THAT REFUGEES NEED MORE ASSISTANCE NOT LESS DURING RESETTLEMENT AS THEIR ENERGY INPUTS ARE NOT AT THE MAXIMUM.

THUS, WHILE THERE MIGHT BE A TOKEN REDUCTION OF
EXPENSES DURING CY 77, REALISTIC PLANNING WOULD CALL
FOR HIGHER EXPENDITURES FOR CY 78 AND CY 79.

7. BOAT CASES: DR. BERTA POINTED OUT THAT THE THAI
GOVERNMENT HAS AN UNDERSTANDABLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS BOAT CASES
IN THAT THAILAND HAS NO COMMON BORDER WITH VIETNAM AND FEELS
THEY HAVE NO MORE OBLIGATION THAN OTHER COUNTRIES WHICH
REFUGEES COULD SAIL TO. WITH NO CHANCE OF LOCAL RESETTLE-
MENT, WILSON AND DR. BERTA GREED THAT A SOLUTION TO HANDLING
BOAT CASES NEEDS TO BE URGENTLY SOUGHT. UNHCR FEELS THAT
THEY NEED TO ESTABLISH A TEMPORARY HAVEN, AUSTERE ENOUGH
NOT TO ATTRACT REFUGEES, BUT ADEQUATE TO HOLD PEOPLE WHILE
RELOCATION/RESETTLEMENT PLANS ARE PURSUED. WILSON AGREED
THAT THIS HAS HIGH PRIORITY AND SAID USG ACTIVELY SEARCHING
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FOR SOLUTION WHICH WOULD INVOLVE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE
EFFORT PREFERABLY UNDER UNHCR AEGIS.
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